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ABSTRACT

This book is designed as a primer on the politics of the struggle for equal educational opportunity in U.S. public schools through a look at the experience of New York State. It shows how efforts to shrink the gap between rich and poor school districts by adjusting state aid formulas are frustrated largely due to the dictates of political bargaining, legislative compromise, and electoral survival, as well as the failure of legal challenges in the courts. Chapter 1 focuses on the ideal of equal educational opportunity as a central part of U.S. democracy as well as the importance of educational policy due to the key role that schools play in modern society. Chapter 2 traces the long struggle for equality in New York State in all branches and levels of government whose goal has been to create a system of educational finance that would eliminate fiscal input disparities. Chapter 3 analyzes the institutional and political constraints that have prevented the success of equalization efforts even when these efforts seemed to have broad-based support. Chapter 4 traces the issues involved in and the outcomes resulting from attempts to impose through the courts changes that could not be achieved through the political and legislative processes. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of New York State's current conditions that prevail as a result of a high court decision to uphold the legality of the current system of educational finance. Chapter 6 assesses certain basic characteristics of society and the governmental system that have precluded success in achieving equality and why fiscal equalization is now less probable. (JB)

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